

# HEALTH

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## What Every Consumer Should Know About Trans Fatty Acids

**Question:** What are trans fatty acids?

**Answer:** Trans fatty acids (or “trans fat”) are fats found in foods such as vegetable shortening, some margarines, crackers, candies, baked goods, cookies, snack foods, fried foods, salad dressings, and many processed foods.

**Question:** Why should I care about trans fat?

**Answer:** It’s important to know about trans fat because there is a direct, proven relationship between diets high in trans fat content and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels and, therefore, an increased risk of coronary heart disease – a leading cause of death in the US.

**Question:** Aren’t all fats bad?

**Answer:** No. There are “good” fats and “bad” ones, just like there’s good and bad blood cholesterol. Saturated fats and trans fat have bad effects on cholesterol levels. Polyunsaturated fats and monounsaturated fats (such as olive oil, canola oil, soybean oil, and corn oil) have good effects.

**Question:** How much trans fat is too much?

**Answer:** There is research currently underway to determine this. However, it is true and accurate to say that the less saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol consumed the better. Trans fat while pervasive in many of the foods we eat is not “essential” to any healthy diet.

**Question:** How can consumers know if a product contains trans fat if it’s not identified on the nutrition label?

**Answer:** Consumers can know if a food contains trans fat by looking at the ingredient list on the food label. If the ingredient list includes the words “shortening,” “partially hydrogenated vegetable oil” or “hydrogenated vegetable oil,” the food contains trans fat. Because ingredients are listed in descending order of predominance, smaller amounts are present when the ingredient is close to the end of the list.

**Question:** Do restaurants have to list the fat content of their foods?

**Answer:** No. But it’s a good tip to always ask which fats are being used to prepare the food you order.

**Question:** Why is it important to read labels?

**Answer:** Labels provide valuable information. An informed consumer is able to make better, healthier choices. So better labels make for smarter, healthier consumers.



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